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SUBJECT: BLAIR SPECIAL ENVOY SEES SOME PARALLELS BETWEEN  
NORTHERN IRELAND AND SRI LANKAN PEACE PROCESS, BUT DOUBTS  
SRI LANKAN PARTIES READY FOR SUSTAINED NEGOTIATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a luncheon discussion with Co-Chair Ambassadors and the Acting Indian High Commissioner on November 14 Prime Minister Tony Blair's Special Envoy Paul Murphy exchanged views on how the Northern Ireland peace process might be relevant for the Sri Lankan context. Murphy was the cabinet minister responsible for Northern Irish Affairs between 2002 and 2005, and was closely involved in the Northern Ireland peace process. He noted that while there are some important lessons that Sri Lanka can draw from the Northern Ireland experience, both sides must be convinced there can be no military solution and both must be committed to a cease-fire, neither of which is now the case in Sri Lanka. End Summary

¶2. (C) Murphy made clear at the outset that he is not in Sri Lanka to mediate or in any way detract from Norway's facilitation effort, but rather to brief on the Northern Ireland peace process experience and the possible lessons Sri Lanka might draw. He ticked off the following points that he thought might be relevant to his Sri Lankan interlocutors.

-- Northern Ireland was successful because all of the parties were involved. The Good Friday Agreement was written by the parties themselves so was likely to stick because the parties themselves have ownership of the Agreement and the process.

-- A fundamental precondition of the process was the conviction of both sides that no one could win a war and that a cease-fire was a necessary precondition for successful talks. Murphy commented that from his limited talks thus far in Sri Lanka it was not clear that either condition now prevails here.

-- International cooperation was a critical part of the Good Friday Agreement. Murphy specifically cited the important role played by Presidents Clinton and Bush, former Senator George Mitchell, and Irish Americans both on the hill and elsewhere. He also praised the EU's financial and political support for the process. Murphy commented it is good the Co-Chairs already are involved.

-- The Northern Ireland peace process was a highly structured full-time peace process in which both sides shared a building, had working level staff, and worked full time on the issues.

-- A critical milestone was the decision by Gerry Adams to move from his support of a military solution to embracing a political settlement. Murphy commented it was not clear the LTTE or some parts of the Sri Lankan military were yet prepared to make a similar move.

-- Another critical element was the importance of trust by all participants in the peace process itself and in each other. Murphy commented and all others agreed that there is virtually no trust for the moment between the parties in Sri Lanka.

13. (C) Several key points emerged from the ensuing discussion.

-- Many of the ambassadors were pessimistic both about the willingness of the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military to seriously pursue peace negotiations.

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-- Likewise they were pessimistic that the international community could bring sufficient pressure to compel the two sides to change their stances, particularly in the case of the LTTE where international leverage is limited.

-- Everyone agreed that the Irish-American Diaspora played an important role in Northern Ireland. In Sri Lanka's case, however, the Tamil Diaspora is much more diffuse in that Tamils live in many countries, and has no clear leadership that can speak for them. Therefore, it is harder to influence the community as a whole or to get them to speak with one voice. We also agreed that if anything the Tamil Diaspora is in danger of becoming more radicalized as a result of the deteriorating military and humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka.

BLAKE